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ASARCO agrees to Denver cleanup

By Alicia Caldwell and Elizabeth Aguilera
Denver Post Staff Writers

A New Jersey company that operated two smelters in north-central Denver agreed in federal court to clean up 100 residential properties contaminated by its plants.

In 2005, ASARCO Inc. will remove soil contaminated with lead and arsenic from homeowners' yards and replace it with clean dirt, according to a consent decree filed Wednesday in U.S. District Court and made public Thursday.

The properties, which will be identified by the Environmental Protection Agency by Dec. 15, are to be chosen from a 4.5-square-mile area that includes the Swansea, Elyria, Clayton and Cole neighborhoods, and parts of Globeville and Curtis Park.

The agreement was good news for neighborhood activists who have battled for years to clean up the contamination.

Lorraine Granado, executive director of the Cross Community Coalition and member of a neighborhood group working on cleanup issues, said she was pleased but

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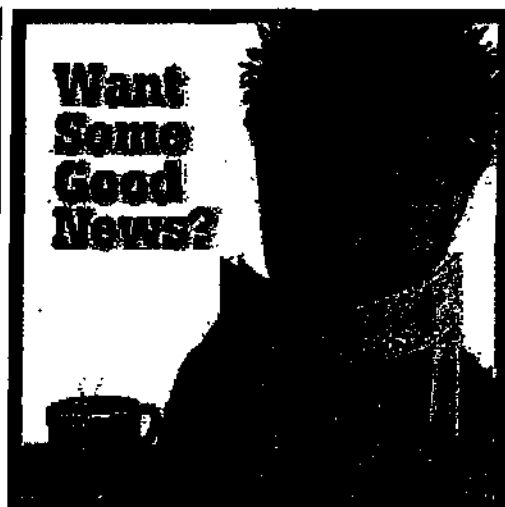
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also surprised that she hadn't heard about it as she has met with government officials.

"It's interesting and confusing," she said. "But wow, some homes are going to be

cleaned. That's great."

The agreement is a milestone in the Globeville saga, which has its roots in a smelting operation that began in 1886.

The cleanup outlined in the consent decree is just one phase in a project that is expected to encompass 850 residential properties at a cost of \$32 million. Last year, local officials announced a \$3.5 million grant to clean up 141 properties.

The contamination is attributed to two ASARCO smelters - the Globe Smelter and the Omaha & Grant Smelter. The smelters processed a variety of metals, including cadmium, lead and copper, and operated at what is now known as the Vasquez Boulevard/Interstate 70 Superfund site.

According to court documents, emissions from the smelters deposited metals, including lead, into the soil in the area. The EPA describes lead as a highly toxic metal. If ingested, it can cause behavioral problems, learning disabilities, and even seizures and death.

In the late 1990s, the state and federal governments began testing soil in the neighborhoods to determine lead and arsenic contamination levels.

Based on those efforts, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency put the site on the Superfund National Priorities List in 1999.

Federal and state agencies have spent more than \$15 million gauging the problem and cleaning up the site, according to court documents.

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The EPA contends that a century of lead, arsenic and cadmium smelting in Globeville resulted in metals contaminating groundwater, surface water and soil.

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